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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

IDLING IN ITALY. By Joseph Collins. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

What ever possessed the author (or more probably the publishers) of this book of virile criticism upon literature and life to call it *Idling in Italy* is one of the mysteries of book-making. The fact is that the book is not in any way the production of an idler, but obviously that of a hard thinker who has a knack of expression. The reader questions whether Dr. Collins has ever permitted himself an idle moment. To dream is human; to judge is godlike. Dr. Collins dreams a little now and then in this volume, but his reveries are always cut short and are immediately criticized by reason. The author does not possess the art of loafing; he is no accomplished *flâneur*, such as, for example, E. V. Lucas. He cannot conceal from the reader the fact that his thought is habitually consecutive and purposeful, and that he is a little troubled whenever he feels that his consideration of a subject has been noticeably incomplete. He is at no pains to mask his determination to say what he means and to mean what he says. The reader gets from the volume ideas, not suggestions; stimulus, not charm. He who picks up the book to be lulled, may lay it down sleepless or enraged. It is a real book, not a piece of literary exquisiteness or a series of agreeable conversational discourses.

Professional men ought to write books, because a profession gives one a point of view, a method, and an intellectual conscience. Those who produce literature should as a rule know something besides literature and should have more than a merely literary grasp upon life and its problems. De Quincey, the type of pure man of letters, has been called a mere "stylistic ghost"; Macaulay, who was something of a politician, is still read occasionally for what he had to say. William James, a psychologist, has written books in all senses literary and more generally read than most purely literary productions. Henry Arthur Jones, a playwright, has written excellent essays, more effective, perhaps, in striking at British complacency, than the speculations and satires of H. G. Wells. One does not wish to hold a brief for the "medicated novel"; but a little medication would not hurt some recent novels; and similarly, a little legality would not hurt some books upon world politics. It is rather an encouraging sign of the times that so many books in these days are written by men who know one thing thoroughly and many things well. Mr. Beck's book on German responsibility for the war, Mr. Kahn's book on our economic problems, may be mentioned as illustrations of what the professional man of broad culture may do in literature.

It may be said in passing that literature with the professional man should not be merely a hobby: it should have a large purpose. Purposeful thinking from men trained to think is what the world needs just now. The lawyer should not discuss at tedious length the question whether Bacon, after all, did write the plays attributed to Shakespeare or the problems relative to the early history of Schoharie County; business men will not do their best work by writing of hunting and fishing in the North Woods, or by describing their trips to Europe, or by contributing something to the current knowledge of the various types of firearms used in the history of the United States.

Of all the professions outside letters, the law seems the most literary. But the law is logic and codified common sense; it has no speculative field, and whatever liberties the judge may allow himself in the way of *obiter dicta*, he is liable to feel in his literary output a certain dryness and lack of artistic completeness. The usual release of the judicial mind seems to be by way of Shakespeare; as a class, lawyers quote Shakespeare oftener and with less literary appropriateness than do the members of any other profession—but this is a little beside the mark. The point is that from a lawyer one may properly expect that excellent, balanced, logical judgment which the law requires—but not, in general, speculation or a display of many-sidedness. The man of medicine, however, especially if he be a neurologist, like Dr. Collins, needs to understand how his patients feel and think, to have a flair for character and temperament. He may also be given to speculation in his leisure hours; for the things he studies are mysteries in their essential nature—whereas, in the law, either a thing is so or it isn't.

All of which is beautifully illustrated by a comparison, in one point, between Dr. Collins's *Idling in Italy* and a recent book by James M. Beck, author of *The Evidence in the Case*. It happens that a considerable amount of space is devoted in both these books to the personality and character of President Wilson. Dr. Collins's characterization of the present Chief Executive as a man with "the mind of Jove, and the heart of a batrachian," is in a way to become classic. Mr. Beck, however, takes issue with it. "Far from having the soul of a batrachian," he writes, "he [Mr. Wilson] is a man of the same mould as all of us. He has eyes, a tongue, affections, dimensions, passions. He is not more selfish than most of the public men of our past history. A pure, unselfish spirit, like those of Washington and Lincoln, is rare indeed. For the rest, nearly all the men who have been distinguished in the annals of the United States have been men who pursued the policy of personal success. He only differs from them in his remorseless indifference to the conventions of democracy." Mr. Beck ends by comparing the President to Malvolio—"You are sick of self-love, Malvolio."

On the whole, the Law and Shakespeare appear to have the better of this controversy. The character of a public man, unlike that of a writer, who exposes himself consciously or unconsciously in his imaginative or autobiographical writings, is better judged by common standards applied with judicial fairness than by the methods of psycho-analysis. Psycho-analysis may add something—it has given us in this case a vivid impression, something far more thought-provoking than the ordinary literary impression—but the final court of appeal is trained common sense.

It is unfair, however, to lay, for better or worse, too much stress upon this one feature of Dr. Collins's book. In dealing with Italian literature and with problems of literature and conduct generally, the author's diagnostic skill, his professional conscience, his intellectual versatility, his aesthetic appreciation as a critic, his tolerance as a man of the world, enable him to write sensibly and charmingly, and lead him to draw sound and often striking conclusions. His reasoning, perhaps, lacks the iron rigidity of Mr. Beck's; but it is meant to convince, and mainly it does. Dr. Collins has written a book of straightforward, intelligible criticism, seasoned with wit; manly and outspoken, though never presumptuous.

It is amazing that any one should have been able to treat of modern Italian authors so encyclopaedically, and yet to say so many distinct and humanly convincing things about each. One likes a plain, frank verdict or summing up, with a little personal flavor, or perhaps a little professional bias (not unfairness) after one has listened to an ingenious and impartial literary discussion. Thus, one is genuinely grateful to Dr. Collins for what he says of D'Annunzio: "He is the true decadent of the nineteenth-century literature, to whom the decadent French symbolists cannot hold a candle." Equally understandable and penetrating is his remark about the most prominent figure among the Italian Futurists: "Signor Marinetti . . . is the most amusing writer in Italy. His idea of beauty is a massive building of concrete in course of construction with the scaffoldings lovingly embracing it. His idea of ugliness is a curve of any kind—save in the feminine body. . . . Signor Marinetti has no delusions of grandeur; he only pretends that he has."

Of another prominent writer, professional acumen and a professional habit of putting truth before sympathy or aesthetics lead Dr. Collins to say: "No one unfamiliar with that strange disorder called the manic depressive psychosis can fully understand Signor Papini." We know how disgusting and how unpopular Nordau made this kind of criticism, how he used it to enforce literary distastes of his own, how he included Swinburne and Maeterlinck among the babblers, the insane scribblers, the people of twilight intelligence. There is nothing of this in the writings of Dr. Collins: he is too wise a man to ride a scientific hobby, and too just and too appreciative to treat people who are doing considerable things in the world as if they were, or ought to be, simply inmates in a private sanatorium. In him, professional, psychological criticism is agreeable, worth while, and not too prevalent. He deals interestingly and sympathetically with "decadents," "radicals," queer people generally—seeing in them something more than crankiness, infantilism, or megalomania. We seldom get such criticism from the purely literary critics, who too often would be afflicted with a kind of holy horror at the thought of approaching an aesthetic question from the standpoint of an alienist. From the alienists we generally get nothing but morbid psychology. Dr. Collins tries to give us that many-sided view which is the best substitute for the simple truth when the latter is not obtainable.

Some of the best things in the book are the general remarks that one finds by the way. They are the considered, but not too carefully hedged, sayings of a man who does not permit himself to generalize over

much. For example: "It is idle to deny that the pitch of man's thought to-day is materialistic, though his unconscious mind is steeped in the mystic." This is something like a brief diagnosis of the modern mentality. Comparing nations is a pastime that generally tends to banality, if not to irresponsible epigram, but the following remark about Italy as compared with the United States is both amusing and sensible: "Italy of to-day is a very new country. Whenever we as a nation do something which the Italians consider gauche or raw, and they are obliged to dislocate an inherent politeness by mention of it, they excuse us because we are so young. So one excuses an infant for some verbal or conductual infraction. In reality, we are about a century older than Italy of to-day, and we have spent that time developing a 'manner' that reflects our protracted habituation to freedom." Here, too, is something better worth saying about the recent literary output of Italy than can generally be said about the modern literature of any nation as a whole: "Were I obliged to characterize the fictional output of Italy during the past few years, I should say that it was imaginatively sterile and emotionally fecund." With these significant sayings—sayings that let in a good deal of light in a few words—one may classify, as similar in quality, the whole of the author's careful, non-laudatory study of the philosopher Samuel Butler.

THE MAKING OF THE REPARATION AND ECONOMIC SECTIONS OF THE TREATY. By Bernard M. Baruch. New York: Harper and Brothers.

The economic sections of the treaty had nothing directly to do with the Fourteen Points, except as these points provided for restoration, and "restoration" was promptly interpreted to mean the payment of damages. Reparation had nothing to do with the covenant of the League of Nations. Consequently it was possible to discuss these matters without becoming involved in theoretic dubieties. Nevertheless, the framing of the economic sections was about as difficult a task as the treaty-makers had to undertake, even though here there was no principle of self-determination to be equitably applied. Hate had been aroused; claims conflicted.

In ancient times if a people had offended the world, or Alexander, or the Roman Empire, as Germany has offended, the solution would have been simple. *Delenda est Carthago!* Cato's formula was logical. But nowadays no one contemplates the destruction, root and branch, of a whole people. And so, strangely, it has been found difficult to punish the Germans adequately, or even to assess the damages. Perhaps, after all, we ought to have marched to Berlin.

How much can Germany pay? That is the question on which all turns. For instance, the question whether the bill should be presented for war costs or simply for damages depends on this. If the sum that Germany can pay, as determined by a calculation of her resources, is limited, then the inclusion of the larger item of war costs would simply alter the ratio of payment to the various Allied nations, with the result that those who needed most would perhaps receive the smallest proportion. Again, it has been pointed out that the imposition of a huge indemnity might work badly in another way. If Germany were